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INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9648  
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3009  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6098  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9207  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3097  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4133  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0862  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0233  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 6651  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4540  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 000843

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/21/2016  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [CE](#)  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: NGO OFFICES TARGETED, LTTE EASTERN  
MILITARY DEPUTY KILLED AS LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT CONTINUES

REF: A. COLOMBO 620  
[1](#)B. COLOMBO 792  
[1](#)C. COLOMBO 759

Classified By: James F. Entwistle, Charge' d'Affaires, a.i. Reason: 1  
.4 (B,D).

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) deputy eastern military commander was one of several fatalities as violence continued in the embattled north and east May 20-21. Unknown perpetrators threw grenades into the offices of three international NGOs in a government-controlled town in the eastern district of Trincomalee on May 21, injuring one expatriate aid worker and two local civilians. The UNHCR Resident Representative (and, currently, Acting UN Resident Coordinator) met Charge' May 22 to advise that the UN would be issuing a statement condemning the attacks and to ask for a parallel U.S. statement. Text of the UN statement follows in Para 9 below; text of the Embassy statement follows in Para 10. While it is often difficult to determine the perpetrators of the different--and regrettably frequent--violent incidents over recent weeks, the fact remains that with each attack that occurs in Government-held territory, the Government appears less and less in control and more and more like a passive observer. End summary.

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MORE GUNS AND GRENADES  
IN NORTH AND EAST  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Violence continued over the weekend May 20-21 in the north and east of Sri Lanka. On May 20 a 12-year-old Tamil student was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen in front of his grandmother's house in the eastern district of Batticaloa, while two Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers were killed May 21 in separate incidents in the eastern district of Trincomalee and the northern district of Vavuniya. The

second-in-command of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) eastern military wing was killed May 21 in Vavunithivu in Batticaloa District. The LTTE dissident Karuna faction claimed responsibility, contending that that the Tiger eastern military deputy and 10 other LTTE cadres were killed in a skirmish in LTTE-controlled territory. The LTTE, while confirming the killing of "Ramanan," its eastern military deputy, charged that he was assassinated by an SLA sniper. (Note: In the east, the Forward Defense Lines separating Government- and LTTE-controlled territory are ill-defined. Vavunithivu is about three or four km from the nearest Government security forces installation.)

13. (SBU) On May 22 Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) Spokeswoman Helen Olafsdottir told poloff that truce monitors had been unable to reach Vavunithivu the previous day to inspect the site but were currently en route. She confirmed that SLMM had received a request from the LTTE to bring Ramanan's family from the north to Batticaloa for the funeral.

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NGOS TARGETED;  
ONE EXPATRIATE INJURED  
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14. (SBU) Also on May 21 grenades were lobbed into the offices of three foreign NGOs--the Belgian-based Nonviolent Peace Force, the Italian Inter SOS and the Dutch ZOA--in Muttur in Trincomalee District. One Serbian employee of the Nonviolent Peace Force and two local civilians were injured in the incidents. The injured Serbian national (who had

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apparently just stepped outside the office at the time of the attack) was airlifted to Colombo for medical treatment and is reportedly out of danger.

15. (C) On May 22 Amin Awad, UNHCR Resident Representative and Acting UN Resident Co-ordinator, called on Charge' to share his concern that the Muttur incident, which clearly targeted humanitarian agencies, marked a new low in the steadily worsening security situation. He reported that his office would draft a press statement condemning the attacks for local release and a suggested statement for possible issuance by the UN Secretary General. Awad said a U.S. statement would be greatly appreciated. He added that he would be calling on other Co-Chair Chiefs of Mission to seek support, as well as the Foreign Secretary. Awad said he doubted that the LTTE, which, despite its frequently inhumane demeanor, generally welcomes the presence of international humanitarian agencies, was behind the attacks. Because Tamils have suffered the most from the recent escalation and thus are more often the beneficiaries of international humanitarian aid in the area, the perception among other ethnic groups and even at certain levels in the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) is that INGOs are "pro-Tamil" and even "pro-Tiger," Awad noted. He offered UNHCR as an example. Because UNHCR's mandate is to work with refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), almost all of whom recently have been Tamil, some Sri Lankans mistakenly believe that UNHCR "favors" Tamils. For this reason, he said, he has encouraged aid workers in the area to target some representative portion of total assistance to Sinhalese communities as well, "even if it's only five or ten percent."

He highlighted growing unease among the NGO community in Sri Lanka at recent reports of GSL intimidation of NGO workers, citing an incident in which GTZ, the bilateral German aid agency, had a training session in Anuradhapura District interrupted by police who demanded to know the identities of Tamil and Muslim participants in the program.

16. (C) Contacts at the Nonviolent Peace Force and at ZOA said that mission directors were traveling from Colombo to Muttur on May 22 and still had not assessed the situation

completely. SLMM Spokeswoman Olafsdottir told poloff that monitors in Trincomalee believe that the culprits may have been disgruntled members of the local Muslim community who were "not happy" that these NGOs were working with Tamils, often in LTTE-controlled territory. She said that her monitors had heard rumors that the NGOs had received threats before the attacks. Olafsdottir reported that the three NGOs had decided to close their offices in Muttur for the time being.

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GOVERNMENT NOT DOING ITS PART  
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17. (C) While Awad did not want to speculate about who might have perpetrated the attacks in Muttur, he expressed disappointment at the GSL reaction in general to the escalating violence and increased flows of IDPs and refugees. Local Tamil residents who fled communal mob violence following the April 12 bombing of a market in Trincomalee (Ref A) told UNHCR they did not feel secure enough to return, primarily because police had stood by and watched as their homes were burned. Under UNHCR procedures, the organization will facilitate the return of those who express a desire to go back to their communities, but the newly appointed Governor of the Northeast (a former Sri Lanka Navy Commander) is demanding that all IDPs return to their homes within three days--whether they want to or not. Awad also noted with concern press reports that in the course of the inquest into the May 13 shooting deaths of nine members of the same family in Kayts (Ref B), GSL security forces had stated that they could not provide security to local residents. (Note: Sri Lanka Army Spokesman Brigadier Prasad Samarasinghe told poloff he was still trying to confirm what was actually said

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in court, but the "ground reality" was that the security forces could not guarantee the security of all residents in areas like Kayts.) Some Kayts residents were reportedly fleeing to LTTE-controlled territory, Awad said. (SLMM's Olafsdottir confirmed that truce monitors had received reports of either 150 residents or 150 families--unclear which--staying at a church in Government-controlled territory in Jaffna awaiting passage into LTTE-controlled territory from Kayts. SLMM had received unconfirmed reports from some IDPs that the Sri Lanka Army had attempted to stop them en route, she said.) In addition, Awad said there were "a few hundred" would-be refugees in the northwestern district of Mannar awaiting transportation by boat to India. UNHCR was still trying to confirm press reports that a boat with refugees en route to India from Sri Lanka had sunk over the weekend, he said.

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UNHCR CONSIDERS THRESHOLD FOR  
LOW-INTENSITY WAR JUST ABOUT MET  
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18. (C) UNHCR has activated its contingency plan for low-intensity war (based on a threshold of 50,000 refugees or IDPs), Awad reported, since "we're almost there (in terms of numbers of displaced) already." He noted that his agency's assessment of the need to begin contingency planning tracks with ICRC's (Ref C). (Note: According to UNHCR's best estimates, slightly over 1,000 refugees have left Sri Lanka for India since January. Trincomalee District has the greatest number of recent IDPs, with nearly 31,000 people still displaced after ethnic violence and GSL aerial and artillery strikes in April. End note.) The UN system's security level for Sri Lanka remains at three (out of a possible five), although "we should be at four in truth," Awad reported.

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UN COLOMBO STATEMENT

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19. (U) Text of the statement issued by the Office of the UN Resident Co-ordinator in Sri Lanka on May 22 follows below.

Begin text: The United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sri Lanka is appalled by the continuing despicable attacks on humanitarian workers in the north and east.

Yesterday's grenade attacks on three international non-governmental organizations in Muthur, Trincomalee District, resulted in serious injuries to one international staff member and two civilians. Last week an employee of the Norwegian Refugee Council was shot dead in Vavuniya while returning home from work.

We strongly condemn these attacks which undermine the ability of the humanitarian community to freely conduct operations, and which instill fear into the thousands of men, women and children to whom we provide relief and assistance. These attacks must be investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice.

The Government of Sri Lanka and all parties to the conflict must ensure the protection and safety of all humanitarian aid organizations working in the country.

All parties must urgently halt the current escalation of violence which is affecting innocent civilians, and work urgently towards a peaceful solution to the current impasse.

End text.

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US EMBASSY STATEMENT

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110. (U) Begin text:

The United States condemns the grenade attacks committed Sunday, May 21, against three international non-governmental organizations (INGO's) in Muttur. The unprovoked attacks against Inter SOS, ZOA and the Non-Violent Peace Force resulted in injuries to several people, including an expatriate NGO worker. These INGO's are working in Sri Lanka to meet humanitarian needs and bring people together in the search for a lasting peace in the country. Violent attacks against such organizations are deplorable and undercut efforts to lay the groundwork for a resumption of talks leading to a final settlement.

COMMENT  
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111. (C) Ramanan's killing is a setback for the LTTE; in the ongoing tit-for-tat violence, the Tigers can be expected to reciprocate--and not necessarily with commensurate force--against GSL, Karuna or even hapless civilian targets. It is hard to say who may have decided to throw a few grenades into NGO offices in the ethnically polarized district of Trincomalee. There is a strong undercurrent of resentment against NGOs perceived as "soft" on the Tigers in some of the Sinhalese community; the same could, presumably, be true in the Muslim community as well. But the more frequent the incidents of violence in Government-held territory--and the more obvious the failure of the GSL to provide security to local residents--the less the Government seems to be in control and the more it seems like only an ineffectual observer of the recurring bloodshed.

ENTWISTLE